

## Historic District Review Committee

### Staff Report July 13, 2009

#### Action Items

**CAPP 2009-0010: Chambers/O'Brien Residence: Replace Fence in the Aldie Historic District. MCPI 396-10-1512.**

#### Background

The subject property is a private home located at 39308 John Mosby Highway in the Village of Aldie. Built in the 1930s by Willy Goode, this house replaced Aldie's general store that previously burned down. The house is a three-bay, symmetrical, two-story stucco building with an asphalt shingle roof and a stone foundation. It is set back 83' from the road. A fence, mainly picket, encloses the rear yard and a three-board fence divides the front yard from the lot to the east (Photo 1). The lot is just under ½ acre.



**Photo 1:** Willy Goode House (39308 John Mosby Highway) in the Aldie Historic District from the road. Note the fence enclosing the rear yard.

The applicant proposes to replace 119' of the existing rear yard fence. This section of fence comprises the entire eastern side of the fence and is located along the property line. Two types of fence, a 90' section of picket fence and a 29' section of privacy fence, will be replaced and built in the same location as the existing fence (Photo 2).

In July 2008, the HDRC approved a new wood picket fence for the rear yard under CAPP 2008-0017. The approved fence is located around the perimeter of the rear yard, except in the southeast corner. It is comprised of 48" high by 3.5" wide pickets spaced at 1.75" intervals and meets the Virginia Building Code. These pickets replaced existing pickets that were similarly shaped but 4" shorter and more widely spaced. The CAPP approval included painting the new pickets white; however, this has not been completed because the pickets needed to season and it has been too wet this spring to paint them.

The section of this fence proposed for replacement begins at the northeast corner of the rear yard and extends south along the east lot line for 90'.



**Photo 2:** Fence along the eastern property line. The 29' section of privacy fence is in the foreground. The 90' section of HDRC-approved picket fence is in the background.

The remaining 29' section of fence along the east lot line is a 6' high, solid privacy fence. It is located in the southeast corner (front) of the rear yard. Installed in the 1990s, this fence was in place when the applicants purchased the property. The fence is painted dark green on the inside; matching the shutters and front door on the house, as well as a front section of fence in the southeast corner. The outside of this section is painted white.

The privacy fence also extends around the corner creating the southern part (front) of the rear yard fence and terminating at the east end of the house. In the recent past, the applicants modified this section of fence by cutting it down to approximately 4' high with a "Mount Vernon Dip." Posts in this section are capped with a wood, low-angled pyramidal top finished with molding at the base (Photos 3 and 4). This fence is also dark green and recedes into the background from the road.



**Photo 3:** Modified privacy fence along the southern perimeter of the east side of the rear yard. Note the "Mount Vernon Dip" and the dark green paint color.



**Photo 4:** Detail of modified privacy fence showing post caps.

The applicants state that the fence along the eastern property line, particularly the 48" high section, does not provide adequate privacy from the property to the east when the applicants are using their new pool. The pool is elevated several feet above ground level; therefore, when applicants sit around the pool, they are at nearly the same height as the top of the picket fence. Additionally, the neighboring property is used for events related to a bed and breakfast use. Among other things, the property is used for outside music and parking. In addition to providing more privacy, the applicants would like to decrease the impacts of the view, noise, and vehicle exhaust smell. Additionally, event attendees have been trespassing, jumping the 4' high fence to use the pool without owner permission. Therefore, the applicants propose to install a new, taller privacy fence along the entire eastern property line.

The proposed fence will be wood, either pressure treated pine or western red cedar. The applicant has agreed to use the material preferred by the HDRC. Cut with a "Mount Vernon Dip," it will range in height from 6.5' at the base of the dip to 7' at the posts. The proposed fence has 4" wide planks with no spacing in between. The planks will be toenailed to the posts in an effort to highlight the posts. The posts will be finished with a "Colonial Gothic" finial at the top. The applicants would prefer to paint the new fence dark green to match the modified fence and house details.

## **Analysis**

### Fences

The Loudoun County Historic District Guidelines for the Aldie, Bluemont, Oatlands, and Taylorstown Historic District (ABOT Guidelines) address fences in the Fences and Walls section of the Guidelines for Site Elements chapter. In general, fences in Aldie mark side boundaries and lots. They are often painted wooden board or rail (ABOT Guidelines, Guidelines for Site Elements, Fences and Walls: Text, pg. 47). Although not a board or rail fence, the proposed replacement fence encloses the rear yard at the eastern lot line. Additionally, fence height must conform to zoning regulations (ABOT Guidelines, Guidelines for Site Elements, Fences and Walls: Guideline 1, pg. 47). In a

zoning referral letter dated June 29, 2009, zoning staff confirms that the proposed fence height meets the maximum height requirement of 8' in residential areas.

Privacy fences are not specifically addressed in the ABOT Guidelines. However, fence heights should not exceed the average height of fences on the surrounding properties in historic districts (ABOT Guidelines, Guidelines for Site Elements, Fences and Walls: Inappropriate Treatments 1, p. 46). Neighboring historic fences include a low wrought iron fence and a brick wall and retaining wall. A modern 4' high wood fence, part of which was approved by the HDRC in 2008, surrounds the rear of the neighboring property to the east, 39338 John Mosby Highway. The proposed height of the fence, 6.5' to 7', exceeds the average height of historic or HDRC-approved fences on neighboring properties, as well as properties in the Aldie Historic District, and does not meet the ABOT Guidelines.

Fence design should relate to the scale, materials, color, and detail of the historic building, with simple designs being most appropriate to the district's historic character (ABOT Guidelines, Guidelines for Site Elements, Fences and Walls: Guideline 5, p. 47). The fence will be wood, which is an appropriate material for fences in the district. The dark green color proposed for the fence relates to the historic house's shutter and front door color, as well as the modified privacy fence along the front of the rear yard. Painting similar elements with the same color and tying in the fence color with the house color scheme will achieve a unified appearance as recommended in the ABOT Guidelines (ABOT Guidelines, Guidelines for Materials: Paint and Color, Guideline 2, pg 138). This dark color will also help the fence fade into the background, making it less visible than a white fence from the road.

The "Mount Vernon Dip" is a simple fence design. The fence type matches the existing modified privacy fence along the front of the rear yard even though this is a new detail. Staff notes that the fence design derives from the fence surrounding Mount Vernon's vegetable garden. However, only the proposed fence's height and dipping panels resemble this historic fence. While the Mount Vernon fence is also 7' tall, the bottom portion is constructed of brick. A picket fence with dipping panels is installed along the top (Photo 4). The Mount Vernon fence demonstrates that using two different materials and textures breaks up the mass of a very tall fence. But it also reiterates that wood fences historically have spaces between each vertical pale.

The height and solid mass of the proposed privacy fence is not in scale with the historic house or the existing picket fence. As previously noted, the proposed fence is taller than the average height of fences on surrounding properties. The change in height of each panel does help mitigate the mass of the solid, 7' tall panels. However, the change is not enough to meet the ABOT Guidelines for scale as well as height.

The applicant proposes "Colonial Gothic" posts for the new privacy fence to relate to the shape of the existing "French Gothic" pickets on the fence that will remain in place. Historically, fence post finials matched the shape of the fence pickets. However, the existing picket fence posts do not have this design feature. Instead, the posts have



pyramidal tops. Since the fence posts will be on the proposed privacy fence, staff recommends that the posts be finished in the same manner as the existing modified privacy fence. These posts are topped with a pyramidal cap finished with molding at the base. This cap will also more closely resemble the pyramidal picket fence posts.



Photo 4: The fence surrounding the vegetable garden at Mount Vernon. It is 7' tall, but the impact of the height and mass is mitigated by using different materials, textures, and spaced pickets.  
<http://www.bumblebeeblog.com/category/garden-seating/>

## Recommendation

Staff recommends deferral of the application because it does not meet the ABOT Guidelines.

Staff recommends that the applicant consider one or a combination of the following alternatives in order to comply with the ABOT Guidelines:

1. Decrease the height of the privacy fence.
2. Use vegetation instead of a solid privacy fence to create a visual barrier along the eastern lot line.
3. Combine materials and textures, including vegetation, to create a less visually intrusive privacy fence while maintaining a simple design.
4. Create spaces between the pales, which is more historically accurate for fences.
5. Use a cap matching those on the existing modified privacy fence to top the new posts.

## Findings

1. *The proposed privacy fence is along the side lot line and to the rear of the house, which is minimally visible from the public way.*
2. *The fence height is taller than the average height of historic or HDRC-approved fences on surrounding properties and does not meet the ABOT Guidelines.*

3. *The mass of the solid, 6.5' to 7' high privacy fence is out of scale with the historic house and existing picket fence.*
4. *The proposed fence posts should be consistent with the existing modified privacy fence. This cap also closely resembles the pyramidal posts on the existing picket fence.*
5. *Wood is an appropriate material for the fence.*
6. *The dark green color proposed for the fence matches the house shutters and front door, as well as the existing modified stockade fence, creating a visual consistency with the house. It also blends into the background, making the fence less visually intrusive from the road.*
7. *The Mount Vernon Dip design is consistent with the modification of the existing stockade fence east of the house and along the southern edge of the rear yard.*

### **Suggested Motions**

1. *I move that the Historic District Review Committee defer Certificate of Appropriateness 2009-0010 for the proposed privacy fence along the eastern lot line of 39308 John Mosby Highway in accordance with the Loudoun County Historic District Guidelines for the Aldie, Bluemont, Oatlands, and Taylorstown Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts based on the following findings...(see findings above).*
2. *I move that the Historic District Review Committee approve Certificate of Appropriateness 2009-0010 for the proposed privacy fence along the eastern lot line of 39308 John Mosby Highway in accordance with the Loudoun County Historic District Guidelines for the Aldie, Bluemont, Oatlands, and Taylorstown Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts based on the following findings...(see findings above).*
3. *I move that the Historic District Review Committee approve Certificate of Appropriateness 2009-0010 for the proposed privacy fence along the eastern lot line of 39308 John Mosby Highway in accordance with the Loudoun County Historic District Guidelines for the Aldie, Bluemont, Oatlands, and Taylorstown based on the following findings (see findings above)....and the following conditions....*
4. *I move alternate motion...*